

Singing and Playing: Ephesians 5:19



Thrust statement: **Paul exhorts Christians to sing and play to the Lord.**

Scripture reading: **Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16**

We are heirs of the “Fathers,” of medieval theologians, of the Reformers, and of the Puritans. To deny such inheritance is to deny our faith. But to claim a historic faith also means to claim one that is constantly moving toward God’s future, and therefore we must learn to claim our inheritance in such a way that it is a help rather than a hindrance in our march toward the future. In other words, we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us. To do this in the case of Scripture is the primary task of a preacher of liberation.

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Within the Churches of Christ, the issue of instrumental music in the so-called worship service is a source of division among equally godly men and women—some in favor, others not. This essay is an analysis of James Burton Coffman’s article: “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music.”^[2] The first part of this study focuses on the principles of interpretation and the last part of this investigation concentrates on the arguments set forth by Coffman against instrumental music. My examination of Coffman’s composition is not to question the integrity of this godly man, but rather to scrutinize his points to see if his opinions are compelling in his rejection of instrumental music—a position that most Christians within the Churches of Christ uphold. This paper will focus primarily upon the arguments presented by Coffman, not judgments expressed by others who are also in opposition to instrumental music.

Two Scriptures that many of the Churches of Christ rely upon to uphold their views concerning the rejection of instrumental music surrounds **Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16**.^[3] These two Scriptures are cited by many well-meaning Christians to substantiate their beliefs that it is sinful for Christians to “sing and play” in the corporate assembly of God’s people. Coffman, for example, denies the word *play*, or *make music*, as set forth in **Ephesians 5:19**. He writes: “It is the commandment of Christ through the sacred writers of the New Testament that commands Christians to sing, not to make music.”^[4] These two passages are frequently viewed as Scriptures to regulate singing without the use of the instrument in a so-called worship service.^[5] For one to praise God

with instruments during the gathering of the saints on Sunday morning is tantamount to rebellion against God. In fact, to sing with the accompaniment of instrumental music is high treason against God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. God will send, according to some believers, one to an eternal burning hell if one dares to praise Him or Christ with instrumental accompaniment. According to Coffman, as well as many other Christians, one cannot sing and play, but only sing (a capella).^[6]

Ephesians 5:19 is generally interpreted as a “worship service” text.^[7] In other words, Paul wrote this text in order to regulate the kind of singing within the assembly, not outside the church. One may praise God with instruments, providing one is not worshipping God during a church service. When the church assembles between the hours of 10am and 11am for Sunday morning worship, the congregations must sing without the accompaniment of instruments, which constitutes one of the five-acts of worship.^[8] Why? Some Christians assert that God forbids His people to praise Him with the instrument when they assemble as a corporate body for corporate worship.

Worship: One's Way of Life

Just a perusal of the Book of Ephesians reveals that **Ephesians 5:19** deals with one’s way of life twenty-four hours a day, not just Sunday morning worship. If one is to identify with this particular verse, one must first learn the whole book in context before postulating his or her interpretation of **5:19**. If one fails to read this book as a book, one can draw conclusions that are not sound. An understanding of the whole helps one to be aware of the part. The task of every interpreter is to seek to know the one specific meaning intended by the author. An author helps his readers to recognize his meaning through its context. Francis W. Beare correctly calls attention to the context in his exegesis of this passage:

19-20. Spiritual fullness comes to expression in joyful fellowship, in song, in perpetual thanksgiving. The Christian’s whole life, when it is given its true direction, moves in the atmosphere of worship. In the context the words cannot refer to the meetings for public worship alone or even primarily, but to everyday social intercourse. The whole expression is modeled on Col. 3:16-17; but **addressing one another** suggest the general relationships of life over a broader area than the “teaching and admonishing” of the Colossians passage.^[9]

Also, Theodore O. Wedel, co-author with Bear, draws attention to the error of limiting this text to the “architectural” building and “Sunday worship”:

But here, as so often, we make the mistake of limiting the concept of church and religion to their architectural expression in a house of God or to our Sunday worship. Have we not also parish halls and cottage parlors and a common life of Christian fellowship on weekdays? Must Christian **singing and making melody** be restricted to our rightly decorous worship hours? And as for **giving thanks always for all things unto God**—this can surely find social expression in games and picnics and singing around a campfire.^[10]

Wedel also bemoans the travesty of limiting **Ephesians 5:19** to special hours. He writes:

Is it not a tragic misreading of the Christian faith that all of us are inclined to relegate “religion” to special hours or seasons and to appointed pieties? Churchgoing and prayer hours are a necessity for the Christian life. Woe unto us if we neglect them. They are the time for listening to the word of God which will clarify for us his will. But the doing of his will is both costing and rewarding in the *now* of every day.^[11]

INTERPRETATION: CONCEPTUAL GRIDS

Before one embarks upon an analysis of Coffman’s essay against instrumental music and an interpretation of **Ephesians 5:19**, a word of caution is given in order to help one approach the text without colored glasses—consciousness of one’s traditions as one approaches the text. It is not uncommon for interpreters to impose their own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When one approaches the Word of God, one should approach every text with a hermeneutics of suspicion. In other words, one should be conscious of his or her own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. One’s interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical evaluation. Everyone must have a self-critical stance toward the tendency to impose one’s own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the interpretation of **Ephesians 5:19**.

For many believers, this Scripture is a verse that regulates corporate singing in an assembly on Sunday morning during a so-called worship service. Through a sleight of hand, this passage is cited in such a way that instrumental music is eliminated from the believer’s life of worship or praise, except when it is outside the church building. In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: “Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts.”^[12]

Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.^[13] Hermeneutics^[14] ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis.^[15] Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the “here” and “now.”^[16] Hayes and Holiday define exegesis as an attempt “to reach an informed understanding of the text.”^[17] This essay is an attempt to reach an informed understanding of the text by looking at the whole and then the particular. The traditional interpretation, among many Christians within the Churches of Christ, is so entrenched in the thinking of men and women that many can no longer distinguish between tradition and the Word of God itself. Everyone should weigh carefully his or her tradition in the light of God’s Word. Jaroslav Pelikan calls attention to the necessity of rethinking cherished traditions:

Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.^[18]

It is possible for an interpreter to miss the point of the text if he or she does not consider the “linguistic, cultural, and historical background to the inspired writings,”

writes Cedric Johnson.^[19] It is also in this vein that Berkhof cautions Christians not to fall into the same trap that many fell into during the Reformation. L. Berkhof again sharpens the focus of caution when he writes:

The militant spirit of the age found expression in hundreds of polemical writings. Each one sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. *Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts.* The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the truths that were embodied in the Confessions.^[20]

EXAMINATION OF BURTON COFFMAN'S ESSAY

As stated above, this examination of Coffman's article is not to question the sincerity of this man of God. The primary purpose is to help individuals who are struggling with this issue, to make a more accurate interpretation of **Ephesians 5:19** in order to bring about more unity among God's people. To set the tone for a clearer understanding of **Ephesian 5:19**, I have chosen to review Coffman's article written against the use of the instrument in praise to God.^[21] His essay is chosen as an example to illustrate the lengths that individuals will resort to in order to uphold one's own "interpretative community." It is obvious that Coffman allows tradition to stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical texts. Every interpreter must exercise caution that he or she does not prune or crop the text to fit one's theological presuppositions. Every believer must learn to reinterpret and to reevaluate the customs handed down through the centuries. It is not uncommon for Christians to identify the traditions of their "interpretative community" with the Word of God itself. It is in this regard that Johnson expresses the basic problem well in his discussion of presuppositions:

Generations of scholars in the field of hermeneutics have recognized the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. C. S. Lewis observed "What we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience."^[22]

Christians often accept what they are taught without question. It is in this sense that their interpretation is neither subjective nor objective. In other words, they have never taken the time to employ their minds subjectively in analyzing the Scripture for themselves, nor have they looked at the Scriptures objectively. Their interpretations are "ready-made or prefabricated meanings."^[23] Their interpretations are hand-me-downs from their interpretative community. It is in this same vein that Stanley Fish rightly says, "In other words, interpretive communities^[24] are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned."^[25] In spite of Fish's deconstruction philosophy, nevertheless, he is correct when he writes:

And, moreover, the way of seeing, whatever it was, would never be individual or idiosyncratic, since its source would always be the institutional structure of which the "see-er" was an extending agent. This is what Sacks means when he says that a culture fills brains "so that they are alike in fine detail"; it fills them so that one's interpretive acts are exclusively his own but fall to him by virtue of his position in some socially organized environment and are therefore always shared and public.^[26]

Leaders, especially minister within the Churches of Christ, often memorize verses from the Bible by the hundreds. But frequently their interpretation is not so much theirs, as it is the interpretation of a social structure to which they belong; that is to say, their interpretative community. Traditions still stand in the way of listening anew to the Biblical text.^[27] Once more, the Gonzalezs' caution: "We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us."^[28] It is still very difficult for individuals to conceive that one might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background. It is also in this vein that O. E. Payne writes about the acceptance of arguments against instrumental music without regard to an examination of long-held traditions:

Most men in like positions, instead of dismissing prejudice and divesting themselves of the warp and woof of long years of custom and environment, preparatory to open-minded research, have passionately rushed to the defense of that to which they have been accustomed, resorting to the Scriptures with no loftier purpose than to search for proof or pretext with which to bolster the doctrine or practice which is questioned.^[29]

Some religious writers within the Churches of Christ suppose they have all the answers. And as a result of this kind of intellectualization, the intellectually correct party ostracizes those who go against the grain with their particular interpretative community. One must be careful that one does not go to the Scriptures to prove what one already believes, but rather to see what they say. Many are so accustomed to reading the Bible as previously taught by generations of interpreters that they cannot distinguish between interpretation and Revelation. In other words, for one to question the traditional interpretations is tantamount to questioning the Word of God itself.^[30]

This failure to discriminate between explanation and Divine inspiration is one of the main obstacles that believers encounter in their efforts to liberate the Bible from its culture and to maintain unity among God's people. The heritage of explaining is confused with the text itself. The faith of the fathers becomes the watchword for orthodoxy; the interpretation of the fathers becomes normative and is passed on as authoritative. One of the most difficult obstacles for any Christian is to approach the text without any strong personal biases. Studying the Bible with colored glasses ultimately leads to distortion of the text.^[31]

People often tend to give preconceived beliefs the same authority as they give to the Bible. In other words, one's preconceived political power is equal to that of the Scriptures. One's own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, makes it very difficult for one to view the Scriptures without prejudice. One's prior understanding and interpretation makes it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text.^[32] The culture of one's heritage controls the text of the Bible. One should never forget that one's own journey occurs within a vast architecture of preunderstanding—no thinking takes place in a vacuum. Frederic W. Farrar draws attention to the religious hatred that generates from this know-it-all attitude:

My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible.
My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ

from mine; therefore you must be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are “heretics.” All heresy is wicked; all heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you.[\[33\]](#)

ANALYSIS OF JAMES BURTON COFFMAN’S “THE SINFUL USE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC” Pagan Society: First and Fourth Arguments

Coffman’s first and fourth arguments against instrumental music surrounds paganism. Since the pagans used instruments in their gatherings, therefore, God and Christ do not approve instruments in either the Old Testament or New Testament, according to Coffman.[\[34\]](#) Having set forth the basic principles of how to interpret the Word of God, as discussed above, it is now appropriate to examine Coffman’s essay to see if he followed the fundamental principles of interpretation or if he allowed his prejudices to blind his eyes to a careful reading of **Ephesians 5:19**. Since his arguments are presented in written form in the *Gospel Advocate*, it is appropriate to deal with his views in order to see if his arguments are sound logically and biblically. Many Christians do not have the background of knowing how to deal with his outlook. Since, I, too, taught many of these same views for over seventeen years in the early part of my ministry among the one-cup and nonSunday School movement, I am qualified to examine the arguments—positive or negative. On the surface his points of view may seem sound, but, at the same time, a closer examination reveals carelessness on his part in the handling of several texts to support his presuppositions.

As stated above, this analysis of Coffman’s article in no way questions his integrity and his sonship to God. But a perusal of his essay does illustrate the scale to which Christians will violate the text, even though not intentionally, in order to uphold tradition. His approach against instrumental music is extremely weak—even to the point of denying that God commanded musical instruments in **2 Chronicles 29:25**.[\[35\]](#) He begins his tirade against “mechanical musical instruments in the worship of God” by calling attention to its use in a pagan society. He states rather boldly his opposition: “Is the use of instrumental music in Christian worship sinful? Certainly! There is not the slightest doubt of this.”[\[36\]](#) How does he conclude that instrumental music is sinful? He states categorically his objection with absolute certainty of its sinfulness. Listen to him as he prepares his readers for his examination, “Let us examine a few of the basic facts that underlie such a certainty.”[\[37\]](#)

How does he know for certain that his views are correct? Pay attention to him as he seeks to justify his negative reaction to the use of instruments. His first argument almost causes one to just stand in shock as he or she peruses his reasoning—pagans used instruments. This argument almost shocks the imagination. This argument is one of the weakest arguments against instrumental music that has ever come to my attention. In the development of this argument, he calls attention to the use of mechanical instruments of music in pagan temples and Nebuchdnezzar’s employment of musical instruments (**Daniel 3:5**). From this he assumes that Jesus forbids the “worship of God with mechanical instruments of music.”[\[38\]](#)

Response to Coffman's Pagan Society Argument

Is the use of instruments sinful simply because one finds the employment of mechanical instruments in a secular society? Coffman advances the notion that since instrumental music is utilized in a pagan society, then God condemns the use of the instrument in praise to Him. This argument is extremely weak in the light of God's Word. For instance, one cannot help but wonder about David and his instruments of music utilized in the Temple to praise God. Toward the end of David's life, he called in the leaders of Israel, the priests, and the Levites—a total of thirty-eight thousand men (**1 Chronicles 23:1-2**). Of this number called in by David, four thousand were chosen to “praise the Lord with the musical instruments” that David had “provided for that purpose” (**23:5**).

The Chronicler also reveals that David, together with some of the commanders of the army, set apart “some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. Here is the list of the men who performed this service” (**25:1**). The sons of Asaph, the sons of Jeduthun, and the sons of Heman were assigned the task of “thanking and praising the Lord” with the “harp” (**25:2-4**). After the enumeration of the sons of Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman, the Chronicler writes:

All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. Along with their relatives—all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD—they numbered 288. Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties (**25:6-9**).

If one thinks that God was not behind this use of musical instruments to praise Him, then one only has to read **2 Chronicles 29:25** to quickly see that it was God who instructed David, not a fertile imagination of David's own devising. This chapter records the purification of the Temple by Hezekiah. The Chronicler clearly states: “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD just as his father David had done” (**29:2**). In the recounting of the events that occurred in the purification of the Temple, the author of **Second Chronicles** reveals the use of instruments in praise to God. Listen as he calls attention to the ultimate source of the authority for this action of the introduction of musical instruments:

He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets. So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets. Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed (**2 Chronicles 29:25-29**).

Contrary to the thinking of Coffman,^[39] the Chronicler says that the source of

authority behind the use of the instruments was God Himself: “commanded by the LORD” ([29:25](#)). How did God command the employment of instruments? Again, the Chronicler says, “through his prophets” ([29:25](#)). Who were His prophets? The record says that they were David, Gad, and Nathan. Does this sound as if instruments were a stench in the nostrils of God because pagans also employed instruments in their everyday life? In Coffman’s efforts to nullify the force of [2 Chronicles 29:25](#), he develops two arguments under the caption: “Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use.” He writes,

‘But they did it in the Old Testament.’ All advocates of the use of such instruments in Christian worship invariably quote 2 Chronicles 29:25, which in the common versions does indicate that God commanded their use. In all probability, this verse is a mistranslation because it is not found in the Syriac or Arabic version.”

He wants to deny this passage since it does not fit his theology. Should one also discount where the Chronicler says, “The Levites and priests sang to the Lord every day, accompanied by the Lord’s instruments of praise” ([2 Chronicles 30:21](#)). The instruments in [29:25](#) are called the “Lord’s instruments” in [30:21](#). Earlier this same Chronicler wrote: “The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the Lord’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the Lord and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, ‘His love endures forever’” ([7:6](#)). Should this verse, too, be eliminated from the Scriptures in order to fit one’s objection to instrumental music? [2 Chronicles 7:6](#) is associated with the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon. Should this Scripture be eliminated from the Bible?

As one examines Coffman’s arguments, one quickly observes that this kind of illogical reasoning is the same illogical reasoning that Jesus experienced with the religious leaders in His day over traditions, which ultimately ended in the crucifixion of Jesus. Traditions take precedence over what God has said. Coffman cannot distinguish, so it seems, between his customs and the Word of God. In fact, he nullifies the Word of God through his inherited traditions from the Stone/Campbell Movement. When he writes: “Is the use of instrumental music in Christian worship sinful? Certainly!” Let us examine a few of the basic facts that underlie such a certainty.”[\[40\]](#) Once more, how does he prove that instruments of music are sinful?

His first and fourth arguments are, as stated above, one and the same, focus on the pagan use of instruments. He states his opposition in clear terms: “The whole world in Bible times was full of mechanical instruments of music, and the pagan temples were loaded with their orchestras.”[\[41\]](#) He thus reasons that God was not behind the use of instruments. Further more, he indicates that God condemned David for the use of instruments—he then based his arguments upon a misapplication of [Amos 5:23](#) and [6:5](#).[\[42\]](#) Is David condemned because He commanded instruments in the Temple? Is God condemned because He commanded David, along with some other prophets, to institute musical instruments in praise to Himself? One wonders if God knew that the pagans were using instruments. Well, perhaps God was sleeping when all this took place! Perhaps, God had not reasoned this issue out very carefully?

The Pattern Concept for a Worship Service: Singing Excludes Instruments

Pattern Theology: Second Argument

His second argument hinges on pattern theology.^[43] In other words, “pattern theology” is the belief that God has ordained a worship service with five acts to be performed in a prescribed manner in order for worship to be true worship. For Coffman, worship is “prescriptive,” not “descriptive.” He views any passage that describes activities in the assembly as prescriptive—five unalterable rituals. For one to deviate from his supposed rituals (acts or elements), one faces the fires of hell. He labors under the impression that objection to instrumental music is based on the New Testament, not tradition as some say. He then seeks to answer the argument that “The banning of mechanical instruments is more of a tradition than something based on Scripture.”^[44] To refute the argument that the rejection of instrumental music is based on tradition, not Scripture, Coffman then relies upon **Hebrews 8:5** to prove that mechanical instruments are not in harmony with the divine pattern for a worship service: “It is the New Testament, not tradition, that prescribes a pattern for Christian worship (Hebrews 8:5).”^[45]

There is not one word in **Hebrews 8:5** about five acts of worship for a Christian assembly. This deduction is a figment of a very fertile imagination. There is not one Scripture found in the New Testament that speaks of Christian meetings as a worship service. The Christian assemblies appear to be based on the synagogue meetings—meetings in the synagogue were not prescriptive, but descriptive. In other words, they were left open as to the elements/acts of the gatherings. This was not true of the Temple. This passage in **Hebrews 8:5** had to do with the Tabernacle—later Solomon’s Temple. On Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the instructions to construct the sanctuary—a sanctuary representative, or copy, of what was in heaven--prescriptive.

He assumes that God has prescribed a worship service with five acts to be performed in a prescribed manner, but he cites no Scripture—in context—that supports his conclusions. He cites **Hebrews 8:5** out of context in order to prove his presupposition that God has ordained a pattern for a worship service in the New Testament.^[46] After misapplying **Hebrews 8:5**, he then asserts: “Singing is a special kind of music. That special kind of music was only prescribed and allowed by the holy apostles (emphasis mine—RDB).”^[47] He discounts **Ephesians 5:19** in which Paul explicitly tells the Ephesians to sing and “make music,” or play. He says, “Thus, when the Scriptures say, ‘Sing,’ it was not necessary to add, ‘but don’t play musical instruments.’”^[48] In this second argument against instrumental music, he drops in this unbelievable statement that also demands a response. One almost stands aghast as one reads his words:

It is the commandment of Christ through the sacred writers of the New Testament that commands Christians to sing, not make music (emphasis mine—RDB). Only ignorance can confuse these terms. Singing is a special kind of music. That special kind of music only was prescribed and allowed by the holy apostles.^[49]

Did Paul exclude the instrument in praise to God? Did he say that the Ephesians were to sing and not to play instruments? Perhaps, a study of The Greek word psallw will clarify the confusion. The verb psallw is employed in the New Testament as expressing praise. The verb psallw has its primary meaning “to sing” with at least the possible

nuance of ‘to sing’ with instrumental accompaniment.”^[50] The New Testament writers employ the word ἀψλῳδ (psalmos) in two senses: (1) the Old Testament psalms, and (2) songs of praise and joy.^[51] For example, Paul in writing to the Romans declares:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: “Therefore I will praise (yalw' psalw, “I will sing praise”^[52]) you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name” (**Romans 15:8-9**).

By the use of the word *psalmos*, Paul is not excluding instruments, even though the singing may be without musical accompaniment. The citation, in **Romans 15:9**, is from **Psalm 18:49**, which appears to be a Psalm sung with instruments. This statement of Paul is about Christ’s ministry to the Jews to confirm God’s mercy to the Gentiles. Just as David praised God for his victory over the surrounding nations, so Christ celebrates His victory over satanic powers that brings about redemption for the Gentiles.

Because of God’s mercy, Jesus is saying, “I will praise (ψαλῶ' psalw) you among the Gentiles,” and “I will sing hymns to your name.” This is not related just to the congregational gathering of the corporate body of believers, but also to individuals in their every day walk with God. This perception of God’s mercy is one of the reasons that Christians sing Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. This outburst of joy, assembled or not assembled, is to praise God for His mercy. Paul and Silas’ singing in prison is an example of this explosion of joy in song to God (**Acts 16:25**). Prior to Paul calling upon the Ephesians to “sing and make music,” he burst forth in rapturous language to capture the hearts of men and women in gratitude.

Praise εὐλογητός, euloghtos, “blessed”) be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory (**Ephesians 1:3-14**).

Ephesians 5:19 is reminiscent of the praise in **Ephesians 1:3-14**. Again, one also finds the word psallw employed by Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: “So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I also will pray with my mind; I will sing (yalw' psalw, “I will sing praise”) with my spirit, but I will also sing (yalw' psalw, “I will sing praise”) with my mind” (**1 Corinthians 14:15**). As one reflects upon this verse, one is conscience that the word yallw' (psallw, “to pluck, pull”) is employed in the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament—translated between 285—250 BC) to translate the Hebrew word /g^~n` (n`g~n, “to play a stringed instrument”) and rm~z` (z`m~r, “to make music in praise to God”).^[53] The usage of psallw in the Septuagint is used to translate the Hebrew word n`g~n twelve times. On the other hand, the word psallw in the Septuagint is used to translate the Hebrew word z`m~r forty times.^[54]

Did Paul exclude the use of instruments in his use of the word psallw? There is no evidence from the context that Paul excluded instrumental accompaniment, but rather the reverse is obvious. Every Christian’s life should be one of praise. Every believer’s life should be one of praising God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for God’s unsearchable love. In Paul’s letters to the Christians in Ephesus and Colossae, he compares the behavior of the unbeliever with the believer. Toward the close of the Ephesian Epistle, he writes that they were to “sing and make music”:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing (a[~/donte", adontes) and make music (yavllonte", psallentes) in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 5:15-21**).

As stated above, many Christians still associate **Ephesians 5:19** with public worship, but there is nothing, as stated above, in the context to identify this as an act that only takes place on Sunday morning between 9am and 10am. While this verse no doubt includes activities that take place in the corporate assembly, the text does not suggest such a restriction.^[55] Believers are to instruct one another through psalms (yalmoi", psalmois), hymns (u{mnoi", Jumois) and spiritual songs (wj/dai", wdais). Paul encouraged them to “sing and make music.” The words *sing and make music* are from the Greek words a [~/donte" kaiV yavllonte" (adontes kai psallentes), which is translated by R. C. H. Lenski as “singing and playing.”^[56]

Lenski further states: “Singing is done by the voice; playing by means of an instrument.” ωψλλω means to let a string twang and thus to play a lyre or a harp, and then to play any instrument as an accompaniment to the voice.”^[57] In other words, the Christians at Ephesus were to “sing and make music.”^[58] This would be applicable not just to formal (corporate) worship, but also on other occasions. Paul’s use of the word Psalms appears to refer to the Old Testament psalms.^[59] This analysis of the Greek and Hebrew words sets forth the argument that this line of reasoning is the most logical conclusion, since this book, as well as the other thirty-eight books, was looked upon as the Word of God (see **2 Timothy 3:14-17**).^[60]

The writers of the New Testament cite the psalms frequently. For example, Luke records a conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders in which Jesus cited from **Psalm 110** (**Luke 20:41-44**). Also, Jesus, before His ascension, called attention to the Psalms in His farewell instructions to the disciples (**Luke 24:44**). Prior to the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood before a group numbering about one hundred and twenty and cited from two psalms (**Acts 1:20-21**): “For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms, ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ [Psalm 69:25] and again he pens: ‘May another take his place of leadership’” [**Psalm 109:8**]

Yet again, when Paul proclaimed the good news to those in Pisidian Antioch, he cited **Psalm 2:7**: ““You are my Son; today I have become your Father” (**Acts 13:33**). The Book of Psalms is one of the most frequently quoted books in the New Testament. Paul not only instructed the Ephesians to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, but he added the phrase, “sing and make music” (a[/>donte" kaiV yavllonte" (adontes kai psallontes), contrary to Coffman’s views. To cite Coffman once more, “Only ignorance can confuse these terms.”^[61] He admits that singing is not the same as to “make music,” which is correct. A well-known Lutheran scholar (Lenski) translates psallontes as “playing.” Why did Lenski translate the word psallontes as “playing”? Before responding to this question, perhaps it would be helpful to observe what Charles Hodge has written:

a[/>donte" kaiV yavllonte" (adontes kai psallontes), singing and making melody, are two forms of expressing the same thing. The latter term is the more comprehensive; as αἰδεῖν (aidein, “to sing”—RD Burdette) is to make music with the voice; αὐλαῖειν (psallein, “to play”—RD Burdette), to make music in any way; literally, to play on a stringed instrument; then, to sing in concert with such an instrument; then, to sing or chant. See 1 Cor. 14, 15; James, 5, 13; Rom. 15, 9.^[62]

Is there any evidence for translating the word psallontes as “playing”? To help solve the problem of translation, it would be helpful to examine a passage in **First Samuel** in which David was summoned to comfort Saul:

Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. Saul’s attendants said to him, “See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the harp (r/NKiB' ÷G<n"m], m+n~gg}n B~kkh!nnor). He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you , will feel better.” So Saul said to his attendants, “Find someone who plays well and bring him to me.” One of the servants answered, “I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play (÷G<n" ['deyœ y)d}~a n~gg}n) the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him” (**1 Samuel 16:14-18**).

The Hebrew words in **First Samuel**: “can play the harp” is translated into the Greek text as eijdovta yavllein ejn kinuvra/^[63] (eidota psallein en kinura, “skilled to play on the harp”). The Greek word psallein (“to play”) is equivalent to the Hebrew word m+n~gg}n (“play”). Then the phrase “know how to play” (y)d}~a n~gg}n) is translated into the Septuagint Greek text as eijdovta yalmovn (eidota psalmon, “understands playing

on the harp”). Thus, when Paul told the Ephesians to engage in adontes (“singing”) kai psallontes (“psalming”), he is utilizing a word (psallontes) that the Jewish Christians in Ephesus understood.^[64]

The believers at Ephesus were encouraged to “sing and play,” frequently translated as “make melody.” Since the Septuagint was the Bible utilized by Jesus and the apostles, it is logical that they would have employed the word psallontes as the Jews currently understood it. The translators of the Septuagint utilized the Greek word psalmon (“playing on the harp”) to express the Hebrew word m+n~gg}n (“play”). When Paul says, “sing and make music (psallontes),” is he not reflecting upon musical composition associated with the Psalms?

It is significant, at least to this author, that Paul, in the Ephesian epistle, unlike the Colossian epistle, adds an additional thought. In the Ephesian letter, he says to “sing and make music,” but in the epistle to the Colossians, he only says, “sing.” Consider the following parallel:

EPHESIANS 5:19-20	COLOSSIANS 3:16-17
<p>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. <u>Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord</u>, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you <u>sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God</u>. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.</p>

Does the phrase “sing psalms” in Colossians convey the same admonition that Paul expresses in “sing and make music”? The word “sing,” even today does not exclude “making music” through instruments. It is not uncommon for individuals to invite someone to go and hear individuals—quartets—sing, but it is understood that just the mention of the word “singing” does not exclude mechanical music. “Make music” is a common term among musicians to mean to “play” instruments along with their singing.

Paul says that this “singing and making music” is to be “in your heart to the Lord.”^[65] How were they to give thanks? Paul says with “singing and playing.” But, Paul added the prepositional phrase, “in your heart to the Lord.” In other words, this singing and playing on instruments should not be mechanical. It is to be done with your hearts, that is to say, not merely with your lips and with your fingers. One sings and plays with his heart when he excites his mind to an understanding of the sentiments presented in the words repeated. This expression attached to “singing and playing” is very similar to the words found in **1 Chronicles 13:8** concerning David and assembled Israel in their rejoicing about the return of the Ark of the Covenant: “David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets.”

Whether one says, “in your heart to the Lord” or “with all their might,” one is saying the same thing. Moses also said to the children of Israel concerning their devotion to God and His Law: “And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but

to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul ([Deuteronomy 10:12](#)). When David exhorted his son Solomon about the building of the temple, he said:

And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. ([1 Chronicles 28:9](#))

Paul, in the Ephesian Epistle, varies this expression in order to drive home the necessity of doing one's "singing and playing" from the soul, not just the mouth. Listen once more to Paul as he addresses the servants of earthly masters: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ" ([Ephesians 6:5](#)). Again, he writes: "Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart" [ἐκ ψυχῆς, ek yuxhs, "from the soul"] ([6:6](#)). The words of Peter also call attention to the inward versus the external: "Love one another deeply from the heart" [ἐκ καρδίας, ek kardias] ([1 Peter 1:22](#)).

This thought—in your heart—is very similar to the words of Paul, as cited above, to the Corinthians: "So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind" ([1 Corinthians 14:15](#)). Paul is saying, in essence, that the whole soul of men and women should be filled with praise. The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs should be sung with a spirit of thankfulness, which spirit permeates the believer's singing and playing—corporately or individually.

Amos and Instrumental Music

Under the caption "Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use," he develops three additional arguments to substantiate his belief system about instrumental music. His first argument under this caption focuses on [Amos 5:23](#) and [6:5](#)). Coffman cites [Amos 5:23](#) and [6:5](#) to justify his position that instrumental music is sinful. He writes: "Furthermore, we must point out that Amos condemned the use of instruments in the Old Testament: 'Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols' (5:23; cf. 6:5)." ^[66] Goebel Music (associated with the Churches of Christ), also makes this same argument against the use of Instrumental music. ^[67] As one seeks to unravel his convoluted reasoning, it is necessary to call attention to the proper method of exegesis. The task of any interpreter is to discover the intended meaning of the author. The way an author helps his readers to interpret his statements is through his context. If one isolates a passage from its context, one can arrive at a meaning that is totally foreign to the author's intent. If one wishes to understand what Amos meant in a particular verse, the reader must examine the way the author thinks and writes in the verses preceding and following his statements. [Amos 5:23](#) and [6:5](#) are anchored in history. One cannot separate the historical setting of the author without destroying the intended message. Is it possible to understand these two texts? Yes, Amos' meaning is available and can be understood from his book. Interpreters need to learn how to read a book as a book. As one seeks to uncover the meaning of any text, one should never read isolated passages divorced from

its historical background. In the examination of these two texts, this study now focuses upon these two verses separately.

Amos 5:23

Amos 5:23 is a favorite text among many Christians within the various subdivisions within the Churches of Christ. Misapplication, in my judgment, is not deliberate on the part of those who cite this verse to give credence to their opposition to instrumental music, but an honest mistake of the heart. An important rule of interpretation of any text is to approach the text with a sound historical treatment. One has to look at the writers of both the Old and New Testaments with a detached eye; that is to say, one must learn to look at the various Scriptures from a neutral standpoint and to see the historical background and to hear the historical Word as it was uttered to the first audience. Many Christians do violence to the historical context in justifying their presuppositions. In the following explanation of this text (**5:23**) as well as **6:5**, one must take into consideration the relevance of the historical details leading up to a particular statement.

There are two different contexts for each of these isolated Scriptures. **Amos 5:23** is associated with the nation of Israel (Northern Kingdom) and **6:5** is associated with both the nation of Judah (Southern Kingdom) and the nation of Israel (Northern Kingdom). Amos writes: “Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps” (**5:23**). The best choirs may have sung their songs, but to God their music was simply noise. The Israelites worship had become meaningless and empty. When one approaches this text with certain presuppositions against instrumental music, this text appears to give validity to one’s beliefs.^[68] The background leading up to this terse statement deals with ritual punctiliousness, even to the point of excess. Just a casual reading of Chapter 4 and 5 reveals worship that is “soulless worship”—worship that was no longer pleasing to God. God, through Amos, states His opposition to that He had earlier commanded:

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. ²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,^a I will have no regard for them.

²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your

harps. ²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (**5:21-24**).

The nation of Israel had turned their hearts from God, and they were using their “religious feast,” their “assemblies,” their “burnt offering and grain offerings,” their “fellowship offering,” and their “instruments” to praise God in a soulless fashion—only mechanical. The Israelites, like so many Christians today, used religion as an emotionless means to stay, hopefully, in God’s grace. The Lord is interested in the heart as well as the mind. It is in this same vein that Jesus responded to an individual who tested Him about the greatest commandment in the Law:

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.^a ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^b ⁴⁰ All the Law and

the Prophets hang on these two commandments. ([Matthew 22:37-40](#))

The Israelites failed in all three. Fifteen hundred years after Moses penned these words ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#) and [Leviticus 19:18](#)), Paul, too, desired the Ephesians to “sing and make music in your heart ($\tauῇ καρδίᾳ$, th kardia, “with the heart”) to the Lord” ([Ephesians 5:19](#)). The *Revised Standard Version* renders this phrase as “with all your heart.” William Barclay in his *the New Testament: A New Translation* translates: “with all your heart.” Edgar J. Goodspeed in his *The Bible: An American Translation* also translates: “with all your heart.” Also, James Moffatt in his *The New Testament: A New Translation* renders this phrase as “praise the Lord heartily.” The case in Greek can be either dative, locative, or instrumental. The sense of this phrase in context is “with the heart.” This sense is also found in a parallel passage in Colossians: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” ([Colossians 3:16](#)). Even if one translates th kardia as locative (“in the heart”), the meaning is still “with the heart.” Just a comparison of [Colossians 3:16](#) with [Ephesians 5:19](#) settles the matter—“with gratitude in your hearts.”

In the Ephesian Epistle, Paul calls attention to the ethical behavior that a servant should exhibit toward his owner or master. He writes: “doing the will of God from your heart” ([Ephesians 6:6](#)). The phrase “from your heart” is a translation of the Greek, which is literally translated “from [the] soul” ($ἐκ ψυχῆς$, ek yuxhs). [Psalm 111:1](#) also captures the expression (“with all your heart”): “I will extol the LORD with all my heart.” When the ark of God was being moved from Abinadab’s house on a new cart, the Chronicler pens: “David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets ([1 Chronicles 13:8](#)). Another psalm of David also expresses the thought of Paul in [Ephesians 5:19](#). Listen to David: “I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart” ([Psalm 138:1](#)).^[69]

The context of [Amos 5:23](#) sets forth God’s attitude about observance of the things commanded by Him when one’s lifestyle is totally contrary to love—love for God and love for one’s neighbor. Many Israelites labored under the impression that if they attended their “solemn assemblies” with their punctilious observance of the rituals commanded by God, then all things would be okay. They failed to understand that what God really desires is the person, not their rituals. Even though the offerings were important aspects of their Levitical heritage, nevertheless, the Lord rejected his own institutions and his instruments of music. These rituals gave its performers a false a sense of security. They had rejected the very heart of the Law. In fact, God taunted them, as it were, to sin:

“Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years.^b⁵ Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings— boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,” declares the Sovereign LORD ([AMOS 4:4-5](#)).

Later, God says, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies” ([5:21](#)). These activities became the focus of God’s hatred because they furthered the false sense of security. One can hardly reflect upon [Amos 5:21](#) without due deliberation upon the words of Isaiah (739 BC), approximately twenty years later,

concerning the same mindset of God against the southern kingdom of Judah:

Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies.¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. (**Isaiah 1:13-14**)

As with Amos (760 BC), so, too, Isaiah (739 BC) gives God's reaction to their rituals, rituals of worship not expressive of emotions of the heart. Both Israel and Judah were lulled into thinking that their religious rituals were fulfilling their religious duties. As observed earlier in this essay, God commanded instruments of music (**2 Chronicles 29:25**) to be employed in the Temple to honor Him. God is not condemning the use of the instrument anymore than He is condemning their offerings. God's rejection of their rituals focused upon their external behavior—behavior that God deplored. They employed their music in a mechanical way as well as their other activities in order to please or appease the God of heaven, so they thought Their worship was not “from the soul.” Their worship was “soulless” worship. The people of Israel practiced ritual over heart obedience. God wants worship from the soul/heart, not mere external ritual. The same is still true today. This is why one must sing and make music with all one’s heart. What did God want from the Northern Kingdom? Listen to Amos as he reveals the words of God to this apostate nation:

¹² For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. ¹³ Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. ¹⁴ Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. ⁵ Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. (**5:12-15**)

Amos 6:5

Once more, Amos focuses upon the don’t-care attitude (**Amos 6:1**). In this Scripture, he begins with the Southern Kingdom and then, immediately turns his attention to the Northern Kingdom and then back to the Southern Kingdom. Once again, Amos leads up to the use of instruments in their gatherings—their homes. **Amos 5:23** appears to be in a context of Temple worship, but **Amos 6:5** appears to be in a context of one’s life outside the Temple. He deals with their sumptuous lifestyles—lives lived in total disregard for the poor. Listen to Amos as the Holy Spirit speaks through him:

³ You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. ⁴ You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. ⁵ You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. ⁶ You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. (**6:3-6**)

Just a casual reading of this text reveals the ghastly consequences of surface religion. In **5:18**, Amos pronounced a “woe” on the Northern Kingdom, now he pronounces a “woe” on the Southern Kingdom (**6:1**). In this pericope (**6:1-7**), Amos condemns their luxurious lifestyle—a lifestyle of self-indulgence and gluttony, which was

supported by a reign of terror (**6:3**). This same life of self-indulgence also appeared in the Northern Kingdom. It is in this regard that God called attention to their extravagance at the expense of the common people: “I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,” declares the LORD” (**3:15**). How does this lifestyle coincide with the Southern Kingdom? One reads of their ivory-inlaid beds, drinking wine by the bowls, use of the finest lotions, no feelings for the poor, and no compassion or understanding of the impending judgment of the Northern Kingdom.

It is in this context that Amos mentions musical instruments. In **5:23**, one discovers that God is not pleased with their musical instruments since their worship was hypocritical—performed in order to impress the people with their acts of piety. Now Amos turns his attention to the imitation of musical instruments employed by David, instruments commanded by God. What is the difference between David and the Southern Kingdom leaders who also employed musical instruments? The answer lies in the attitude. In other words, David employed the instruments to God’s glory, but, on the other hand, their instruments were used for frivolous songs. David made songs for God’s glory, but they made songs to the glory of their feast. These individuals were not serving the Lord but their own appetites. The context of **6:5** is that the songs were “frivolous” in nature. They composed songs and played them on harps as David did. The one was frolicsome; on the other hand, the other was for God’s glory. They had, so to speak, their jazz, their rock and roll, and their hard-rock music. There is a proper and an improper use of songs and instruments. One can hardly read Amos 6:1-5 without due reflection upon Paul’s admonition to the Christians in Ephesus. Listen to Paul as he addresses the proper use of songs and instrumental music, not drunken songs sung with musical instruments:

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (**Ephesians 5:18-20**)

Worship: Relegated to Mere Spectators

This is the third argument under his new caption (“Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use”). His second contention surrounded **2 Chronicles 29:25**, which is dealt with earlier in this paper. His third quarrel with the use of the instrument is as weak as his other opinions developed in his short essay. He complains that if one allows one to play the instrument, then this moves the so-called worship service from the hands of the church into the hands of professionals.^[70] He continues his arguments by writing: “Thus, the congregation’s role as participants in the worship is relegated to the status of mere spectators.”^[71] This argument is extremely off base. If one were to apply this kind of rationale, then one would have to stop one person from preaching and another individual from leading in prayer, or another person from leading the singing; otherwise, according to Coffman, the “worship is relegated to the status of mere spectators.”

This whole subject of worship needs a theological overhaul by the Christian community. The Churches of Christ need to rethink the traditional concept of worship.

Believers must reanalyze the question: What Is Worship? It is true that in corporate worship, one is to be active, not passive. Having said this, one must also realize that participation is not always actually participating by outward visible performance. For example, one can attend a Christian assembly and participate without actually performing in the activity in a visible way. Is this a contradiction? No! For instance, one can participate by paying attention and involving himself or herself in the activity, which is passive participation. The only kind of singing mentioned in the New Testament in an actual assembly is found in First Corinthian 14. This singing is solo singing, not congregational singing. Even though only one person sings, nevertheless, there is still broad participation by all, even though passive in nature. The same is true when one or several play instruments; there is still broad participation, even though passive in nature.

This kind of participation also includes the way one responds to other activities that occur in the assembly. Even though a congregation usually has only one person to address the congregation, still the congregation involves itself through the way it thinks and receives the message. In the heart one plays a part in all the activities, even though one does not actively engage in the solo, preaching, prayers, and so on. When God reaches one's heart in sensitivity to the spirit-filled preaching and prayers, one still joins in the actions, even though listening is passive in nature. It is not correct to say the congregation has relegated its activities to the "spectator" status.

CONCLUSION

All the arguments against instrumental music by Coffman are based upon a so-called worship service, which is based on the philosophy of "pattern theology. If God has not ordained a worship service with five prescribed rituals, then his position about the sinfulness of instrumental music is null-and-void." The issues presented by James Burton Coffman^[72] focuses on a so-called worship service on Sunday morning—usually about one hour. The current concept of worship is one of the great obstacles to unity among God's family today. Christians are divided over something that the New Testament never addresses. The Scriptures never legislate concerning certain rituals to be carried out in a so-called worship service—a service with five prescribed rituals that have to be executed in a precise manner.^[73] The New Testament does not use a worship formula for the Christian assembly, or meeting. In 1977, Dwaine Dunning debated Rubel Shelly over the use of the instrument in the Christian assembly. In this debate, Dunning successfully argued that all Shelly's arguments were null-and-void since the New Testament never ordained a worship service for the Christian community.^[74]

^[1] Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 31.

^[2] James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20. In spite of the fact that I am dealing with his arguments, this essay is not written to impugn his integrity or his sonship to God. Even though we disagree over the instrument, I still regard Coffman as a sincere child of God—one that has eternal life in and through Jesus the Messiah.

[\[3\]](#) All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[\[4\]](#) James Burton Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 29.

[\[5\]](#) Ibid.

[\[6\]](#) Ibid

[\[7\]](#) To illustrate this mindset, the late E. H. Miller (1909-1989), my uncle, wrote an essay, in 1945, entitled, “The Establishment of the Church,” in which he enumerated the so-called five-acts of worship as the identifying marks of a true church. See “The Establishment of the Church,” in Homer L. King, *Old Paths Advocate*, ed. Homer L. King (Lebanon, Missouri: Old Paths Advocate, 1945), 70, where Miller writes:

We cannot escape seeing that in the above five items of worship, simplicity is an outstanding characteristic of the church established by our Lord, just as he has shown in all his teaching and examples in his own life and work.

[\[8\]](#) The above citation from the late E. H. Miller is also advanced among other Church of Christ folk other than just among the one-cup and nonSunday school movement. It is advanced by many Christians upon the presupposition that God ordained a worship service with five prescribed rituals, one of which is to sing without the accompaniment of an instrument. It is in this vein that Curtis Cates, Director of the Memphis School of Preaching, writes about the five-acts of worship. See Curtis Cates, *Worship: Heaven’s Imperative, OR Man’s Innovations* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publications, 1993), 21, where he writes: “Please be assured, dear reader, that there are five items of worship set forth clearly in the New Testament; there is a Divine pattern for worship. The early church engaged in those acts (Acts 2:42).” Then on pages 42-46, he discusses the mechanical instrumental music as a violation of one of the so-called five-acts of worship. This view of worship is still very entrenched into the thinking of God’s people, even though one never reads of five-acts of worship in the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament writers never tell Christians to gather for a worship service in order to perform five prescribed rituals, rituals that constitute a “Divine pattern for worship.”

[\[9\]](#) Francis W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Introduction and Exegesis, The Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 10:714.

[\[10\]](#) Theodore O. Wedel, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Exposition, The Interpreter’s Bible* 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 715.

[\[11\]](#) Ibid., 713, 714.

[\[12\]](#) See Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, “Hermeneutics,” *NTC’s Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991, 97.

[\[13\]](#) Ibid.

[\[14\]](#) See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: “The term ‘hermeneutics,’ . . . simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation”; see also Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God’s Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, “In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another.”

[\[15\]](#) See Morner and Rausch, “Exegesis,” Ibid., 72, 73, where they say, “Originally, the detailed analysis , explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or, by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage.”

[\[16\]](#) See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth* (Rand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

[\[17\]](#) John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s handbook, Revised Edition* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 23.

[\[18\]](#) Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

[\[19\]](#) Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20.

[\[20\]](#) L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 28-29.

[\[21\]](#) See James Burton Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music, *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20-22. This saintly man was ninety years old as the time of this writing. Today he has just approached his 100th birthday.

[\[22\]](#) Johnson, *The Psychology of Interpretation*, 45.

[\[23\]](#) See Stanley fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 172, for an excellent presentation of subjective and objective interpretation.

[\[24\]](#) Fish does not use “interpretative community” but “interpretive community.”

[\[25\]](#) Ibid. I disagree with Fish’s philosophy of the text being unstable. If I understand Fish correctly, he is a deconstructionist in his philosophy. See Morner and Rausch, “Deconstructive Criticism,” *NTC’s Dictionary*, 50-51, where they explain “deconstruction”:

An approach to LITERARY CRITICISM based on the views and procedures of the French thinker Jacques Derrida. Deconstructive criticism utilizes reader-centered theories of meaning that ignore reference to the author's intention and deny the possibility of a terminable meaning or "correct" interpretation for any text. Deconstructive criticism make possible innumerable contradictory but "undecidable" meanings. First becoming prominent in the 1970s deconstructive criticism is central to POST-STRUCTURALISM.

[\[26\]](#) Fish, *Is There A Text*, 335.

[\[27\]](#) See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 48-68.

[\[28\]](#) Ibid., 31.

[\[29\]](#) O. E. Payne, *Instrumental Music Is Scriptural* (Hanna, Alberta: Canada, 1920), 17.

[\[30\]](#) For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 68-71.

[\[31\]](#) See Johnson, *The Psychology of Interpretation*, 42, where he captures, in concise language, the subjective biases of all interpreters:

My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms: and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.

[\[32\]](#) For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 68-71.

[\[33\]](#) Frederick W. Farrar, "Religious Hatred," quoted in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92.

[\[34\]](#) James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20, 21.

[\[35\]](#) Ibid., 21

[\[36\]](#) Ibid., 20

[\[37\]](#) Ibid.

[\[38\]](#) Ibid.

[\[39\]](#) Ibid., 21, where he says, “In all probability, this verse is a mistranslation because it is not found in the Syriac or Arabic versions.”

[\[40\]](#) Ibid., 20.

[\[41\]](#) Ibid.

[\[42\]](#) Ibid., 21.

[\[43\]](#) Ibid., 20

[\[44\]](#) Ibid.

[\[45\]](#) Ibid. See also Dallas Burdette, “Congregational Worship and Division” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 18 November 2005], under the caption SERMONS and then, under the subheading WORSHIP, for analysis of the underlying cause of division within the Stone/Campbell Movement—a movement that has divided into at least twenty-five or more warring factions.

[\[46\]](#) See Dallas Burdette, “True Worship” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 18 November 2005], under the caption SERMONS and then, under the subheading WORSHIP. For an excellent analysis of rethinking the worship concept of five acts, see Mike Root, *Split Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992).

[\[47\]](#) Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 21.

[\[48\]](#) Ibid., 22.

[\[49\]](#) Ibid., 20, 21.

[\[50\]](#) Ralph W. Harris, Executive Editor, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary: Sigma—Omega, Word Numbers 4375—5457*, vol. 16 (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1986), 541.

[\[51\]](#) See Ibid., 542.

[\[52\]](#) The verb is first person, singular, future, active, indicative and means “to pull, twitch, twang, or play.”

[\[53\]](#) Harris, *The new Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, 541.

[\[54\]](#) Ibid.

[\[55\]](#) See Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 394.

[\[56\]](#) R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians, Commentary on the New Testament* (St. Paul Minnesota: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937; reprint Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1998), 620 [page references are to reprint edition].

[\[57\]](#) Ibid.

[\[58\]](#) See James Moffatt, *The New Testament: A New Translation* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1950), where he translates Ephesians 5:19-20:

Converse with one another in the music of psalms, in hymns, and in songs of the spiritual life, praise the Lord heartily with words and music, and render thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ at all times and for all things.

[\[59\]](#) See Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 169, where he says,

‘αλμοῖ (psalmois) may refer to OT psalms or songs, ὑμνοῖ (jj&umnois) to NT hymns about Christ or Christian canticles, and ωρῶν (wdais) to spontaneous hymnody—songs from Scripture, songs about Christ, and songs from the Spirit. Also, since ‘αψλλω (psallw) originally meant “pluck a stringed instrument,” ‘αλμοψ (psalmos) could allude to musical accompaniment (cf. Moffatt, “with the music of psalms”; Turner, Words 353).

[\[60\]](#) For a more detailed study of the relevance of the Law to the believer, see Dallas Burdette's sermon: “Delight in the Law of the Lord: Psalm 1” [ON-LINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 18 November 2005], under the caption BIBLICAL STUDIES, and then under the subheading OLD TESTAMENT, then under PSALMS.

[\[61\]](#) James Burton Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 20.

[\[62\]](#) Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 305.

[\[63\]](#) *Septuaginta*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1979.

[\[64\]](#) See Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 1295, where they comment on the word “psalm” and “making melody”:

psalms—generally accompanied by an instrument. . . . **Making melody**—Greek, “playing and singing with an instrument.” **In your heart**—not merely with the tongue; but the serious feeling of the heart accompanying the singing of the lips (cf. I Cor. 14:15; Ps. 47:7).

See also Harold W. Hoehner, “Ephesians” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983), where he comments on the meaning of the words “making melody”:

First is communication with **one another with psalms** (*psalmois*, OT psalms sung with stringed instruments such as harps), **hymns** (*&umnois*, praises composed by Christians), and **spiritual songs** (a general term). Second is communication with **the Lord** by *singing* and *making melody* (*psallontes*, singing with a stringed instrument) **in the heart**.

See also Alfred Martin, “Ephesians” in Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, Editors, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 1314, where he writes about the Greek participle translated as “making melody”:

Psalms. This word usually indicates songs set to instrumental accompaniment, as does also the participle translated **making music** (*psallontes*).

[\[65\]](#) This phrase will be examined in detail in Chapter 3 of this series. For now, I want to illustrate that this phrase has to do with one’s wholehearted commitment to the Lord. Some sincere Christians cite this phrase, out of context, to justify condemnation of instrumental music.

[\[66\]](#) Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 21.

[\[67\]](#) Goebel Music, “The New Testament Commands Us to Use Old Testament Psalms,” *The Spiritual Sword* 10, no. 1 (October 1978): 22-27.

[\[68\]](#) This kind of application is what I call Church of Christ hermeneutics. In other words, this brand of hermeneutics isolates Scriptures from its context and then builds its theology upon the so-called book, chapter, and verse citation. This is same kind of interpretation that Satan exercised in his confrontation with Jesus when he cited from Psalm 91:11-12. Satan misapplied the intent of the author, thus Jesus had to correct his application with another Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:16). This author, Dallas Burdette, also cited these two Scriptures in the early years of my ministry. I was not conscious that I, too, had misapplied these Scriptures.

^a Traditionally *peace offerings*

^a Deut. 6:5

^b Lev. 19:18

[\[69\]](#) This phrase (“in the heart”), as rendered in the KJV, will be dealt with more

exhaustively in Chapter 3 of this series.

b Or *tithes on the third day*

[70] James Burton Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 22.

[71] Ibid.

[72] In concluding my remarks, I again want to stress that I believe that Coffman is a true believer in Jesus as the Savior of the world. He is God’s child. When he passes from this life, he will enter the gates of eternity. Unfortunately, this paper is necessary to assist those who read Coffman’s essay to understand more clearly the teaching of the Holy Spirit on this subject. His mistake is an honest mistake of the heart, not rebellion against God. Salvation is not contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge, but rather upon one’s acceptance of Jesus as Lord. All error is error but not all error will condemn one’s soul, otherwise no one could be saved. All truth is true but not all truth is essential to salvation, otherwise no one could be saved. Am I in fellowship with Christians in error? Yes! What other kind are there?

[73] For a detailed study of worship, see Dallas Burdette’s studies on worship, located under www.freedominchrist.net [ON-LIN] under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WORSHIP [accessed 24 November 2005].

[74] Rubel Shelly and Dwaine Dunning, *Shelly—Dunning Debate* (William C. Johnson, Inc: West Monroe, Louisiana, 1977).